The World of Letters as Others See It

The Feminine Domination of England.

HERE, then, are these ladies coming to the front in a regular phalanx, just as in the early '90s Mme. Sarah Grand, Mrs. Caffyn, Mrs. Steel, George Egerton and Ella Darcy were doing. The first point of interest is—how does this new band compare with that old one? Has it, allowing for the difference of times and manners, something of the same aims and methods that those earlier writers had, and is it achieving something of the same success? One great difference immediately leaps to the eye. The ladies of the early '90s were one and all propagandists. New and wonderful to them was the freedom of the modern woman. Who knew but that in another fifty years they might even have the vote? Women had been seen riding bicycles in knickerbockers, one woman somewhere had smoked a cigarette and the mere whisper of the mystic words "equality of the sexes" made a novel sell like hot cakes. Those dear, old fashioned, cozy, comfortable days of "The Heavenly Twins," "The Wages of Sin," "The Yellow Aster," "Some Emotions and a Moral" and "The Open Question"! Where are the leaves of yesteryear? Once again we have inequality of the sexes, but this time it is the man who is subordinate.—*From "Women Novelists." By Hugh Walpole in the London "Saturday Review."*

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An English View of E. A. Poe.

POE'S tragedy as a poet is that he was compelled to a compromise: he was forced by the necessities of his life to use his great rhythmical gift in writing poems that might pass with an American editor of the Martin Chuzzlewit period. It is not surprising that he gave up the struggle and devoted himself to work of a kind that permitted him to make a little money without losing his own self-respect. Keats without his £2,000, Shelley without his private income—would they, we wonder, have written more, or more finely, than Poe? But they would at least have been sustained by a handful of understanding friends. It does not appear that Poe had one.—*From the London "Times."*

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France's Negro Novelist.

"BATOUALA" was awarded the prix Goncourt, a great distinction and a wonderful advertisement, and immediately a fusillade of articles for or against the book began, first in the literary reviews, then in the daily newspapers. The Goncourt academicians had always preferred strangeness to real distinction; twenty years after Zola's last successes they still affected the literary formula of naturalism; they were not afraid of what the average reader still calls immorality either, rather favored it; finally their partiality for such a book as "Le Feu," by Barbusse, at such a date as 1917, showed that even the war had not been able to shake off their old belief, acquired toward 1895, that literature as well as philosophy ought to be above patriotism. Probably they would have been less inclined to give their 5,000 francs—once enough money for a year in Rome or in southern Spain—to M. Rene Maran, if he had not been a colored man; probably, too, his views on the management or mismanagement of central Africa by French administrators had flattered the ten academicians' taste for a little scandal. For it was soon rumored that this negro writer, himself employed as a French official in Congo, had indulged in startling revelations concerning the doings of the whites in the regions where he had lived.—*From the "Saturday Review."*

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How Fast Should You Read?

QUICK reading leads to alertness of mind. By increasing your speed you will very likely remember more easily what you have read. Tests have shown that the quickest readers are the best at answering questions on the subject matter. At the very least, you should be able to read at the rate of 300 words a minute. Public speeches are often made at more than half that speed. Book reviewers are said to average nearly 500 words a minute. There are people who get through a 100,000 word novel in two hours, and pass an examination on what they have read, and I once heard of a professor who read long paragfaphs at a single glance. His reading speed was claimed to be 70 words a second, 4,200 a minute, or one novel in twenty-four minutes. He paid a special library subscription to be allowed to take out six novels a day! In these days, when there is so much to be read, it is a great advantage to be a quick reader; but very, very few people know whether they are quick or slow. Try timing yourself; it may lead to your increasing your speed and thus getting through a great deal of enjoyable reading matter which you would otherwise miss.—*From the London "Daily Mail."*

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Literature and Russian Revolution

THAT this didactic mission did not affect the artistic integrity of Russian literature is evident, if we compare such a book as "Notes of a Huntsman" with "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Whatever was best in Russian literature unintentionally served a revolutionizing purpose. Thus, when Lermontov was killed at the age of 26, Nicholas I. is reported to have exclaimed with glee "Bon voyage!" Yet the young poet had not written a single line which would make him eligible for the rigidly communistic Clarte. His danger to autocracy lay in his intense hatred for Philistia. The monarchists Gogol and Dostoievsky contributed more to the analytical and nonconformist tendencies of Russian youth than tons of underground revolutionary proclamations and pamphlets, where all the i's were distinctly dotted and all the t's were plainly crossed. Mikhailovsky, the narodnik critic, rebuked Chekhov for writing "to no purpose," yet most of the pre-revolutionary public resolutions of 1904-5 ended with Chekhov's verdict: "Such a life is impossible." Even revolutionary propagandists found that the peasants and workmen were easier to affect and convert by fables and allegorical tales and by such poetical prose as that of Gershuni's "Broken Dam" or of Gorky's "Song of the Falcon" than by all the brochures of Engels and Kautsky. "To the madness of the brave—we chant glory!"—who can gauge the power of this early motive in winning the hearts of Russia for the cause of the revolution?—*From "The Role of the Intellectuals." By Alexander Kaun in the "Freeman."*

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What Is a Great Book?

I NEED hardly say that by a great book I do not mean necessarily a good book or even a book with the highest qualities of human genius. I mean rather a book which makes one feel that the author has hit the nail on the head with a precision which leaves no room for criticism—a book of which it is impossible to say that the man did not quite know his job or was not quite up to handling his tool. In a great book one must never for a single instant have the feeling that the author has "cracked a weak voice to too lofty a tune." The book must have something thrilling, almost awe inspiring, about it—something that transports one and makes one hold one's breath as does every true success in the arts. Every one knows the feeling with which he closes the Book of Job or "Le Pere Goriot," "Hamlet" or Shakespeare's "Sonnets," Racine's "Berenice" or "Pride and Prejudice," Orme's "History" or "Killing No Murder," Halifax's "Character of Charles II." or "The Tale of a Tub." If ever there was a great book it is the last named. Swift was perfectly right when he exclaimed in the agony of approaching dementia: "Good God, what a genius I had when I wrote that book!"—*By J. St. Loe Strachey in the "Nineteenth Century."*

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"Don Quixote" and Its Author.

THE first part of "Don Quixote" was published in 1605. It had an immediate success, and not a few pirated translations of it appeared within the next few years, both in French and in English. The second and perhaps the better part of "Don Quixote" was published in 1615. Its author, Miguel de Cervantes, died on the same day as Shakespeare in the year 1616. He was born in 1547, and he led the adventurous life of a typical Spaniard of the sixteenth century. He fought at the famous battle of Lepanto, receiving three gunshot wounds, one of which permanently maimed his right hand, "for the greater glory of the right," as he himself said. Four years afterward he was taken prisoner by the Barbary corsairs and kept as a slave in Algiers till the year 1580. From that time onward Cervantes earned an insufficient living as a writer and a petty Government official. He was always very poor. He was more than once imprisoned, and there is a suggestion that the first part of "Don Quixote" was written in a prison cell. He died of dropsy, and a few years before his death he was described by a French admirer as "old, a soldier, a gentleman and poor."—*From "John o' London's Weekly."*

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Forain and Huysmans.

IN 1880 Huysmans celebrated Forain as a curious painter of certain corners of contemporary life, and declared, while attributing to him the sense of *soirees mondaines*—the gesture of the fashionable and correct at their pleasures—that he was even more spontaneous and original when he interpreted the various types of the women of the demi-monde, "who had found in him their veritable painter." In Huysmans's "L'Art Moderne," which was published by Charpentier in 1883, one may follow the further development of this conception of Forain's work. In "Certains," published by Stock in 1889, he placed Forain with this conclusion, "Added to his qualities of acute observation, of deliberate, rapid, summary drawing, of giving significance to the slightest appearance, boring beneath the surface of things by a single stroke, he has brought into art the sagacious irony of a mocking Parisian."

Forain and Huysmans established a friendship that endured until the death of the author of "A Rebours." Amusing anecdotes are told of their comradeship, their witty invectives against the modern social system. When Huysmans retired to the Benedictines and gave himself up to religious mysticism Forain paid him frequent visits. Beneath their official masks of "Mocking Parisians" they were both given to devotional contemplation and the practice of the Roman Catholic rituals.—*From "J. L. Forain—The Man and His Work." By Louise Gebhard Cann in the "International Studio."*

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American Literary Expatriates.

THEY really departed, they wanted to live on the other side. That was the new phenomenon; and I am not thinking only of Whistler and Henry James. There was Bret Harte, who never came back; there was Ambrose Bierce, who came back, but unwillingly, after ten years; there was Eugene Field, who set his heart on a "career in England"—a thing that could not have occurred even to N. P. Willis; there was Stephen Crane, who had his career in England and died there. It is not as if these were merely names chosen at random out of a long list of equally capable American writers. Aside from Eugene Field, and aside from Howells and one or two others, they were the most gifted men of their time; it is because of this that their emigration has a real significance. What is even more significant is that Mark Twain and William James, the most characteristically "American" minds of their period, repeatedly expressed a longing for Europe that was all but unknown to the generation before them; in the end Mark Twain lived abroad for many years, and we can see from William James's correspondence how difficult it always was for the latter to acclimatize himself in his own country when he came back from one of his European years. Here we have one of the important changes that had taken place since the first half of the century: those who accuse the present generation of lacking roots occasionally forget that the process of deracination has been going on ever since the civil war.—*From the "Freeman."*

Literary Pilgrimages at Home and Abroad

V. Where Becky Sharp Lived on "Nothing a Year."

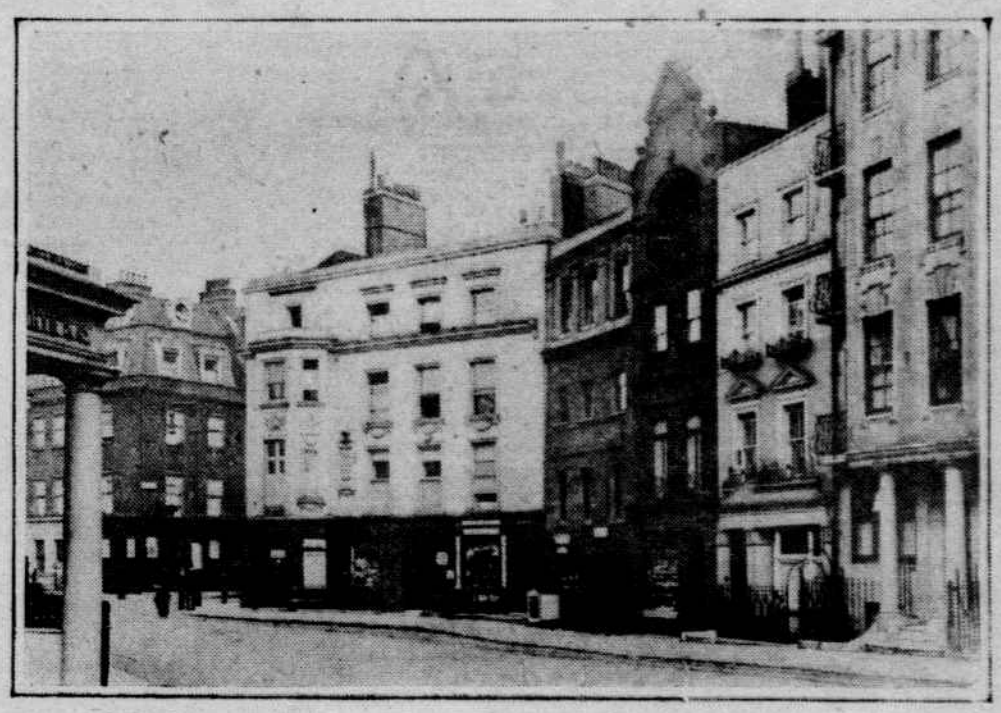
ALTHOUGH Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" was written in 1846 and 1847 and dealt with the period of Waterloo and the ten or fifteen years following the great battle in the Lowlands, many of the scenes of the story are to be found little changed or not changed at all in the London of to-day. A great many American visitors in London find their quarters in the neighborhood of Russell Square. On the west side of the square there is still standing the house of the Osbornes, which George Osborne left to marry Amelia Sedley and to meet in the conflict of June 18, 1815, a death worthy of a better man in the paragraph which marked the transformation of the "Vanity Fair" from the Pictures of English Society for which it was originally planned into one of the enduring novels of all time.

In Thackeray's time the region to the northwest of Russell Square and behind the British Museum was a region of open fields, but to the south it was in general outline much the same as that part of London of to-day, save where the construction of the Holborn Viaduct swept away the labyrinth of twisting and sloping little slum streets. Running diagonally from Holborn to Southampton row is Hart street, where young George went to school in the establishment of Mr. Veal. In fact, that part of the narrative which concerns itself with the fortunes of the Osbornes and the Sedleys might be called a novel of Bloomsbury.

But most readers of "Vanity Fair" find the Osborne-Sedley chapters far less interesting than those which deal with the distinguished social successes of Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, *nee* Rebecca Sharp. Gaunt House, the residence of the wicked Lord Steyne, where she reached her apogee, has been identified as Manchester House, which fronts Manchester Square, and which now holds the famous Wallace collection. It was there that Becky played Clytemnestra, and, in powder and patches, the most *revissante* little Marquise in the world sang "The Rose Upon My Balcony." There that eventful evening, which was the greatest triumph of her life, she was placed at the grand table with his Royal Highness and the rest of the great guests.

The home of the Rawdon Crawleys in London was described in detail in the chapter entitled "How to Live Well on Nothing a Year." The Crawleys rented the edifice, designated as 201 Curzon street although there is in Curzon street no such number—from Raggles, an old servitor of the Crawley family, of course ignoring the vulgar business of paying the rent, with the result that Raggles, having to pay taxes and rates and the interest on the mortgage to a brother butler, ended his days as a debtor in the Fleet prison. Though a misleading number was given in the novel, there has never been any difficulty in identifying the house, which is the second from the right in the accompanying picture.

Curzon street, Mayfair, is a street rather difficult to find for the reason that, while directly behind Park Lane, it does not open on that thoroughfare of stately residences, but must be approached either from the Lane or from Piccadilly by way of zigzag intervening streets. It was a street and a structure admirably fitted to the needs of the Crawleys, who lived there from the time of their return from Paris until the evening when Rawdon, released from the sponging house in Cursitor street, went home to find Lord Steyne in Becky's company and to strike the nobleman to the ground. "Becky admired her husband, strong, brave and victorious," wrote Thackeray, and then, reading what he had written, brought his fist down upon the table with the words: "By God, that's a stroke of genius!"



The house in Curzon Street, Mayfair, London, where the Rawdon Crawleys of W. M. Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" lived on "nothing a year." The house is the second from the right in the picture. Curzon street is just behind Park Lane.